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ABSTRACT

This digest examines reasons for youth unemployment and its effects, the counselor's role in school-to-work transitions, vocational adjustment, intervention strategies, and current needs. (BH)

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# IN BRIEF

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**An Information Digest From ERIC/CAPS**
Educational Resources Information Center
Counseling and Personnel Services

# Unemployed Youth: Counseling Issues

Unemployment among young people is a serious and persistent problem, with more than 20% of youth, aged 16-19, currently unemployed. Unemployment rates rise to more than 50% among members of minority groups, high school dropouts, and youths in economically disadvantaged areas. This digest examines the reasons for youth unemployment and its effects, the counselor role in school-to-work transitions, vocational adjustment, intervention strategies, and current needs.

### Reasons for Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment is largely determined by the uncertainty of products, resources, and social influences. Individual factors associated with unemployment include academic, mechanical, and employability skill deficits; and race, age, and sex discrimination. Social and industrial factors include size of the youth population, shortage of job opportunities, technological revolutions in the marketplace, unequal distribution between jobs and available young workers, legislative disincentives, and poor economic conditions. Youths are negatively affected by all types of unemployment — structural, seasonal, cyclical, and frictional.

### Effects of Youth Unemployment

Unemployment has destabilizing consequences both for society and for the individual. Youth unemployment affects the Gross National Product through lost production and the effect on economic output, as well as the large sums spent on social support programs. Costs to the individual include lost earnings, lost interest in future employment efforts, loss of credibility in the workplace, and psychological problems such as mental stress, despair, alienation, family pathology, and suicide. Secondary personal costs include those associated with the effects of unproductive time, e.g., crime, vandalism, and drug and alcohol abuse.

### Counselor Role: School-to-Work Transitions

Although young people rely more on familial and social resources for job information and opportunities, the school counselor can take a proactive role in assisting youth in acquiring the knowledge, attitudes, and skills which comprise both general and specific employability. General employability refers to those skills important to gaining and maintaining a job (work behaviors, social development, physical endurance, and academic skills). Specific employability relates to maintaining a job by being able to perform specific tasks on that job.

The counselor can also serve as a community liaison, program and curriculum innovator and developer, youth advocate, family interventionist, and value and needs facilitator for young people in transition. The school curriculum also has a crucial role in developing decision making skills in students. Such a curriculum offers competency-based, experiential learning modules on career orientation, personal inventory taking, resume production, and job seeking campaigns.

### Vocational Adjustment

Successful adjustment to work is a sequential process of adjustment to various aspects of the job — performance, organization, interpersonal relations, responsibility, and affect. For youths, work entry problems tend to cluster around job performance, access to the job, and managing a career. Effective counseling services address the pre-transition problems of work selection and co-worker and family issues; the transition difficulties of adjustment to the work site; and the post-transition concerns about role, status, lifestyle versus job requirements, and community adjustments.

### Intervention Strategies

Intervention strategies have traditionally fallen in five program categories: school, government, industry, community, and generic economic schemes. School-based programs have attempted to provide on-the-job-training experiences in combination with classroom learning. Government-sponsored programs, such as the Manpower Development and Training Act, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act, and Job Training Partnership Act, have attempted to provide opportunities and incentives to the marketplace.

Industry-initiated programs such as those at IBM and General Electric have provided job training within industry for those youths who meet their program criteria. Community programs have attempted to extend and fill the gaps left by government-sponsored programs. Economic schemes, such as alterations in minimum wage or sub-minimum wage programs, have attempted to alleviate youth unemployment through financial incentives to potential employers.

### Current Needs

To facilitate employment, collaborative efforts and structures to match employer needs with employee needs and skills must be undertaken. Effective programs require a dual, yet integrated focus:

- The role of various training mechanisms and facilities needs to be expanded through apprenticeship training, mandatory occupational skill training, post-secondary technical schools, sheltered enclaves within industry, and further monetary incentives to employers.
- Industry and education should form collaborative planning boards to expand vocational opportunities and innovations, to develop work-life curricula, to add vocational placement personnel to school-based counseling programs, and to provide readily accessible, online occupational information to young people.

Compiled by Barbara LeRoy, Abstractor, ERIC/CAPS

*List of resources available upon request.*

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